



Mouth Care for People with Diabetes

To most people, a great smile means white shiny teeth and fresh breath. People with diabetes face special challenges in keeping a healthy mouth and pretty smile.

Why worry about mouth care?

- Bacteria feed on high sugar levels in saliva. If you have diabetes, bacteria can easily grow in your mouth and cause infection.
- Blood vessels change as diabetes progresses. This weakens your resistance to infection.
- Gingivitis can develop when teeth are not cleaned well enough. Gingivitis causes redness or bleeding of the gums.
- Periodontitis is a more serious infection that occurs in bone and soft tissue below the gum line.
- Mouth infection can lead to loose or lost teeth, pain while chewing, and high blood sugar levels. If untreated, infection can spread to the blood.
- Fungal infections (also called “thrush”) can develop as a result of high blood sugar levels. People with dentures or partial plates have a greater risk of fungal infection.

How can I prevent oral problems?

You can prevent mouth problems by:

- Visiting your dentist at least twice a year. Remind dental staff that you have diabetes. Ask your dentist which products are best for you to use.
- Using a toothpaste that is recommended by the American Dental Association (ADA).
- Not using mouthwash unless your dentist tells you to.
- Brushing your teeth at least twice a day, for at least three minutes, using a soft bristle toothbrush. Battery operated toothbrushes are also good to use.

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- Using your toothbrush to gently stroke the insides of your cheeks and your tongue. This helps remove bacteria that can collect and cause infections and bad breath.
- Replacing your toothbrush every three months. Germs can grow on bristles, so toss your toothbrush after an illness and after having a cold sore.
- Flossing daily to remove bits of food trapped below the gum line that brushing alone cannot remove. Waxed dental floss can be easier to use.
 1. Begin with 12 to 18 inches of floss.
 2. Wrap it around your middle fingers.
 3. Gently bring the floss down between the teeth (never snap it down).
 4. Curve the floss around each tooth and lightly scrape the side with the floss, start below the gum line and work your way to the top of each tooth.
- Keeping dentures very clean. Brush them twice daily using a denture brush. Leave your dentures or partials out at night. Soak them in water or an ADA approved cleaning solution. Visit your dentist if an ulcer develops or yearly for oral cancer screening.
- Not smoking or using tobacco. This increases the risk of infection.

Adaptation of an information sheet developed by the Altoona VA Medical Center, Altoona, PA

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